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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1217  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 2525  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003505

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS  
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TAGS: PREL PGOV TH

SUBJECT: ARMY TELLS AMBASSADOR IT WANTS PEACEFUL,  
DEMOCRATIC SOLUTION

REF: BANGKOK 3492

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a November 28 meeting, Deputy Army Commander General Jiradej Kotcharat told the Ambassador that the only solution to the political crisis was via peaceful, democratic means. The Army was concerned that there was no way to take back the airports without massive damage to the facilities. General Anupong's November 26 suggestion that Somchai dissolve Parliament and the People's Alliance for Democracy leave the airport was a consensus decision by leaders of diverse parts of society that Army considered neutral.

¶2. (C) Comment. That Jiradej and the Army have remained solidly against a coup gives hope that a solution within the rule of law will be possible. However, the Army's concern that there is no way to take back the airports without numerous casualties and substantial damage to the airports point to a sustained crisis with no apparent solution. End comment.

ARMY SEEKS SOLUTION VIA BOTH SIDES STEPPING BACK

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¶3. (C) During a November 28 meeting with Royal Thai Army Deputy Commander General Jiradej Kotcharat at Army Headquarters, the Ambassador urged the military to allow a democratic solution to the political crisis. Jiradej agreed that there was no room for military involvement. He said that Army Commander General Anupong Paochinda's November 26 suggestions that Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat should dissolve Parliament and that PAD disperse from the airports were a consensus view of the Monitoring Committee for the Situation/Unrest in Bangkok. The Army considered the proposal representative of neutral figures from academia, civil society, bureaucrats and business. The Committee had decisively decided that the suggestions were the only way out of the conflict.

¶4. (C) Jiradej said that the Army had hoped that the government and the PAD would listen to the suggestion and that elections would allow the public to choose a new government. Sadly, both sides were too firmly entrenched to take a step back. Jiradej said that the Army and the

Committee would look for another strategy to solve the crisis. Jiradej acknowledged that a pro-Thaksin party would win a new election, but said the results would certainly take away any legitimacy from the PAD. It would be very difficult for the PAD if it did not accept the results of a new election.

¶ 15. (C) The Ambassador stressed that, due to the deep divisions described by Jiradej, only a political solution would solve the crisis. The Deputy Army Commander agreed with the Ambassador that any solution would be within the democratic system. Jiradej said the Army would remain outside the political process and only wanted to be increase professionalism through training. A coup would be counterproductive as the Army believed that the court cases against former Prime Minister Thaksin would no longer have legitimacy. Jiradej said the Army, as a defender of security, wanted to apologize for the suffering of foreigners caught up in the political dispute.

¶ 16. (C). Jiradej said that Thais expected that their government should be able to look after the people and maintain social order. Unfortunately, the Somchai government had proven that it could not meet these expectations and was corrupt. It was unable to maintain law and order and had strengthened the deep divisions in Thai society. The lowest point had now arrived as the nation was suffering after the government was unable to maintain Suvarnabhumi Airport as the gateway to Thailand.

¶ 17. (C) Jiradej said that even though the formal pattern of  
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elections in Thailand was once every five years, a responsible government should know when to step down and allow for a new government. Governments around the world had demonstrated the willingness to accept responsibility and step down when necessary.

#### TAKING BACK AIRPORTS WOULD CAUSE GREAT DISRUPTION

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¶ 18. (C) Turning to plans to take back the airports, Jiradej said that earlier November 28 he had attended a meeting with Interior Minister Kowit Wattana. Jiradej said he had shared the Army's opinion that any action to clear the airports of protesters could result in hundreds of casualties. Violence on this scale would rally supporters to PAD cause, Jiradej said. Furthermore, forcefully removing the PAD could result in the closure of the airports for many months. Jiradej said that damage to the control systems of the airport could not be avoided. Also, chemicals and flammable substances were stored at the airport and would likely be used in defense by the PAD.

¶ 19. (C) The Ambassador asked if a solution through negotiation would be possible. Jiradej doubted this was an option as the PAD was determined to bring down the Somchai government. The PAD saw the government to be the nominee of the former Prime Minister Thaksin and no compromise was possible. Jiradej said it was well-known that Somchai made decisions at Cabinet meetings after phone consultations with Thaksin.

#### PAD LEADERS WILL NOT LISTEN TO OTHERS

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¶ 10. (C) The Ambassador asked Jiradej if PAD Major General Chamlong Srimuang would listen to the opinion of the international community now that American and other nations' citizens were suffering. The PAD leaders would not listen to anyone, Jiradej said, they were totally preoccupied with ridding the country of Thaksin's influence.

JOHN